loud paper

dedicated to increasing the volume of architectural discourse

♥ ♠ *volume 2, issue 1* ♦ ♣

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loud paper is a zine dedicated to increasing the volume of architectural discourse. It is a text which is a slambamgetitoutthere way of linking together architectural thoughts, musings and new work to the culture at large.

loud paper is an outgrowth of a frustration caused by the stagnation of ordinary forms of architectural dialogue. It challenges the failed systems of glossy trade magazines which solely publish the big gun architects, academic journals which maintain the elitism of an overly intellectual language (as well as the same cast of theoretical characters) and the slowness of book publication. These systems deflate the spirit of new architectural thinking. A louder, faster system must be implemented.

loud paper is open to all: students, architects, educators, girls about town, dear Johns, and critics as a place for writing loud about architecture and culture. Submissions of articles, projects, letters, book and music reviews, no matter how loosely architectural are accepted.

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call for submissions

loud paper is currently accepting submissions for a Spring issue. Contribution deadline is March 1, 1998.

This issue is a lot about Las Vegas and a tiny bit about SCI-Arc Thesis. Why combine the city of endless nights, crapshoots, showgirl reviews, Siegfried and Roy, the Rat Pack, miniature cityscapes, glowing green giant lions, and Wayne Newton performing nightly with thesis? Well, considering that too many articles have already been written on the Neiman Marcus of art museums, the Getty, (so much fodder, so little time) I figured that an alternate subject matter needed to be explored. So, that takes us back to the polemic of thesis or Las Vegas.

Looking at some of the terms which typify Vegas may help in clarifying the diptych. To begin, there is the obvious parallel between the endless night which offers no sense of the outside world and comes complete with a 24 hour buffet which is created with lights, mirrors, and labyrinths of slot machines and the late night studio environment found during pre-presentation charette. Thesis students, like the old ladies and conventioneers who find themselves forever stuck in the loop of night, rarely see the light of day. Model materials, sculptural installations and rolls of vellum replace the confusion of neon and reflection which disguise all exits to the real world.

The term "crapshoot" finds its analog in "juried review." There is significant gamble in presenting a thesis worth of work to a panel of intellectual types, clad in black. It's like

Special thanks to John, Margaret, Margi, Jeremy, Michaela, Michael, Michele, Chip, Andrea, Kevin, Moon, Joel, and More.

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facing off against a blackjack table of seven (nine, twelve?) magnificent dealers, who could coolly rake your project across the felt table and feed it to the "house." An early conception of this issue was as the "You Bet Your Thesis Issue." While that title has now been scrapped, there is no question about it, the review is high stakes for big rollers.

As for showgirl reviews, Siegfried and Roy, and gigantic lions, as well as, the whole gaudy colored light fiesta which is the Strip, they all aspire to one thing: spectacle. Thesis at SCI-Arc posits itself as both review and as exhibition. This combination usually results on an emphasis on presentation. Hardlined plans and cleanly crafted models are only the most pedestrian part of presentations. Thesis students, in order to hedge their bets at an exciting thesis, create entire environments from which to expose their work. The whole effect of the review/exhibition is as Guy Debord writes: "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images." Although no plumed headdresses or white tigers are forthcoming, airplane wings, ice sculptures, and staged readings were part of last year's festivities.

Finally, the big named jurors brought into the school to grace reviews hearken back to the Rat Pack and Wayne Newton performing in the "big rooms" of the casinos.

"Media stars are spectacular representations of living human beings, distilling the essence of the spectacle's banality into images of possible roles." -G.D.

Due to appear this year are such steady acts as Frank Gehry (fresh from his Grand Tour of Europe) and Thom Mayne. Rafael Moneo, a new comer to the lounge circuit, is sure to bring some Nöel Coward type class to the cotillion. The biggest difference between these acts and the Las Vegas floor shows, may be the profound lack of tuxes and there is no two drink minimum.

It also should be noted that this issue takes a Las Vegas from outside Las Vegas approach to all that fabulousness. Being cooped up at school for too many days staring at the computer screen has hindered any recent forays into the promised land, but has increased the number of fantasy visits. To best enjoy this installment of 'loud paper' pour yourself a gin and tonic, find some deluxe accommodations, and enjoy.

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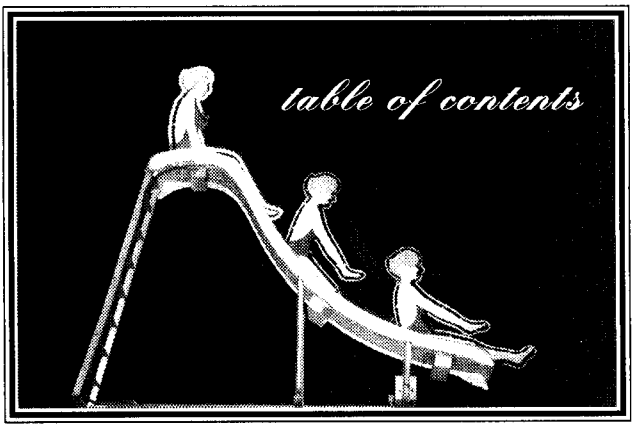

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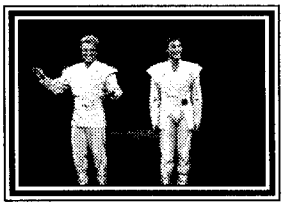
♥ a Pilgrimage

Gazing out the seventeenth floor window of The Mirage Hotel-Casino. The Strip undulates before me, beckoning.

A Pandora's Box of opportunity for a bored college student on vacation with her parents. Out of all the seductive glitter, one edifice holds my hungry eye: 160 feet of billboard that make up a significant part of the Mirage exterior. Billboard is not a rich enough word to describe it. A shrine! The Masters of Illusion, chief gods of the town of illusions. When you see it you know to whom you must sell your soul in this town. Towering above the insignificant mortals who dare to enter his realm - the cheekbones alone put you firmly in your place - Siegfried's ice-blue stare pierces you, invites you, challenges you to enter his lair. Miles of feathered blond hair, smooth chest, all encased in sleek white satin. The faithful Roy at his side, a foil to Siegfried's Aryan majesty, his flowing dark locks are pulled back (they have since been shorn into a hip spiky look). He too sports the piercing stare and the white satin. (Pay attention to the white theme.) Wayne Newton, eat your

Michaela Goldhaber



Siegfried (a monument worthy of Valkyric passion) and the dark, brooding Roy

heart out - this sign tells us - these boys are in charge.

Many have extolled the glorious vision of the Las Vegas strip lighting up the desert, a modern fairyland promising as much money, booze, and sex as you can squeeze out of it, if you just guess the magic number, or caching the right cachang, or woo the queen of hearts. The Mirage and Treasure Island have become the jewels in the Strip's crown. Even with such novelties as a miniature New York skyline and a gargantuan green lion, Steve Wynn's glittering twin sister casinos steal the show. Same shape - a nouveau-baroque pattern of three enormous wings bursting forth from the lurid casino chrysalis - different gimmicks. Treasure Island has the Pirates. Weather permitting, you can watch a Royal British Navy ship sunk in flames by raffish pirates firing cannon shots, and a cast of actors so desperate for work that they are eager to be plunged into the murky waters of this desert oasis every hour on the hour. Ahoy, me maties! The Mirage has the best buffet in Las Vegas. It also has the most advanced climate control technology, revitalizing its world-weary gamblers with extra oxygen and areas of tropical humidity. Fine mists, palm trees, and orgiastic flowers greet you as you walk through the lobby, past the shark tank (as if there weren't enough sharks in Vegas). And The Mirage has Siegfried and Roy . . . .

I have been to the "NEW" Las Vegas - "family vacation" spot, theme park, ten times the old price - twice. Both times with my parents. Neither time did we see Siegfried and Roy at The Mirage. Too pricey, sold out, on Christmas vacation - so we saw Cirque du Soleil's Mystere, a thrilling theatrical experience. However, my memories of Las Vegas always center around those enigmatic Prussians: the towering Siegfried (a monument worthy of Valkyric passion) and the dark, brooding Roy (maybe it's just a syllabic impairment, but Roy always

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Vee vant to save the vhite tigahs!

Vee vant to save the vhite tigahs!

Vee vant to save the vhite tigahs!

seems to me to be the Robin to Siegfried's Batman). Siegfried and Roy have become for me a symbol not just of Las Vegas, but of America. They serve as Vegas' lodestone, drawing people towards the casinos, and demonstrating that the dream CAN pay off. A real-life rags-to-riches tale, of the kind all Americans love: only a life-or-death gamble could have brought these boys from Bavaria, who were making their living performing a cheap cruise-line magic show, to their one true home in the enchanted desert.

I am obsessed with Siegfried and Roy. I admit it openly. The path through Las Vegas is littered with their relics, and here I follow this path and make my pilgrimage to discover the allure of Siegfried and Roy.

Actually walking along the strip, sprung for a brief moment from the cigar smoke and ching ching ching into some kind of air. It's always a shock, since you never know what time it is in this twenty-four hour world. The sidewalk connecting The Mirage and Treasure Island, for those daring enough to bypass the tram, the secret underground passageway, and the Transporter. The reward: a stunning bust of Siegfried, Roy, and one of their fearsome beasts done in bronze, rising high, with a convenient niche for photo opportunities with the great ones. Pure idol worship. I paused to make the traditional ritual offering:

I placed my head in the tiger's mouth.

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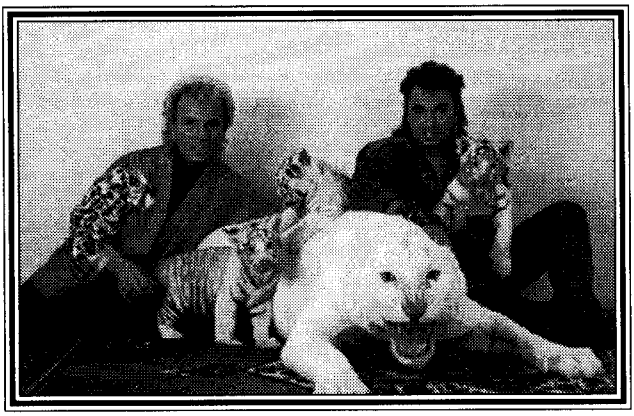

Round the clock, a white tiger is on display in a giant case along one of the many labyrinthine corridors of The Mirage. Usually, the tiger is sleeping, but occasionally a little light bathing can be witnessed. The endless loop of video outside the display case provides my first real glimpse into the mystery of Siegfried and Roy. You see them scampering, carefree, with their killer beasts on their desert compound in West Las Vegas. Wrestling, rolling, playing like children, laughing like lovers, rolling like thunder... I don't dare to contemplate the private lives of the great. But these upstanding men (with their upstanding hair) are committed to a cause. A cause dear to every desperate-for-any-rallying-point-for-their-liberal-guilt American's heart. Cute, cuddly, near-extinct wild beasts, and they can even make them disappear. The tigers must disappear twice nightly to prevent their ultimate disappearance from the planet. This is a strategy only divine magicians could conjure up. I learned the mantra: "Vee vant to save the vhite tigahs! Vee vant to save the vhite tigahs! Vee vant to save the vhite tigahs!"

The Secret Garden of Siegfried and Roy! Had I found the true place of worship at last. White tigers, white lions, Asian elephants, a troubled black panther, and a few other unique specimens compromise this menagerie. Upon entering the hallowed ground, one is given a device, remarkably like a cellular phone which one must hold up to one's ear and dial the appropriate numbers printed runically on the animal's domain. Right in

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"Velcome to my secret garden: a vorld between the vorlds!"

your ear, intimate, confiding, is the voice of Siegfried. "Velcome to my secret garden: a vorld between the vorlds!" As you wander (vander?) through this exotic safari, Siegfried and Roy, continue whispering sweet nothings about the animals you are observing. "Kimba vaz very depressed. She vouldn't eat. I meditated vit her, and finally gaint her trust..." An initiation into the mystery. These are the secret rites of Siegfried and Roy, one part new-age spirituality, one part eco-consciousness, and several generous helpings of pure Las Vegas glitz. Add WWII movie accents, ambiguous sexuality, and some kick-ass lighting effects. Stir, stir, stir.

One of the guards said that Siegfried had been there that morning, looking in on the animals. He had chatted graciously with the crowd, and even signed autographs. Tears welled up at the near miss of it, the lost chance for a brush with the divine. I consoled myself with a souvenir Secret Garden of Siegfried and Roy flashlight. Unlike the lingering mystique of Siegfried and Roy, it only worked until I got to the airport.

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White Lions of Timbavati

"Meaning "the river that never dries out," the word Timbavati couldn't be a more apt description of the majestic animals which were rescued from the brink of extinction by Siegfried & Roy's conservation program. The first male white lion cubs in the Western Hemisphere are among the program's offspring.

Snow White Tigers

The snow-covered foothills of the Himalayan mountains are the ancestral home of the snow white tigers. Believed by some to be the first tigers to exist on the planet, the snow white tiger is distinguished by faint stripes or no stripes. The first snow white tiger to become a member of Siegfried & Roy's conservation program was a majestic, blue-eyed female named Sitarra, meaning "Star of India."

Striped White Tigers

Distinguished by white coats with light brown stripes, these tigers are extremely rare and exotic. Believed to be extinct until a cub was found by the Maharaja of Rewa in 1951, there are now close to 40 white tigers that make Las Vegas their home, thanks to a 15-year conservation and breeding program by Siegfried & Roy."

God Status:

a user's guide

Timing is everything, banal but true. Especially if you are looking to become an immortal god, be it rock, art, or architecture. The proof is in the pudding, like a fine French souffle, timing is everything. This adage is even more essential when death is involved. All the right factors need to be in place: fame - people need to miss you when you are gone, youth old people die all the time, youth is potential and the death of potential is far more tragic than potential realized, talent - added loss, the media goes crazy with this one, documentation - pictures, video, 16 mm footage, just make sure your work is acid free for posterity, you never know how much the Getty will pay for you paper napkin sketches.

A slight variance in any of these factors and your god status will never be reached. Right now, I could never achieve immortality. Yeah, I have talent, potential and youth, but no fame and I always forget to take slides of my models. Perhaps a better example is Michael Hutchence, former lead singer of INXS. The poor bloke killed himself at exactly the wrong time.

When I was in high school, that man was it. He had it all, a pair of ripped jeans for every day of the week (acid washed to perfection,) hair to toss, a sexy pout (or was it sexy eyes?) and teenage girls placing lip-gloss kissed TeenBeat photos of him in lockers and on notebooks. He was sex, and he even had a giant chrome pin that said so. It gleamed from his leather jacket as he lunged towards the camera in the "I Need You Tonight" video. Yet, when he died last month,

Mimi Zeiger

apparently of self-strangulation with his belt, an inadvertent, auto-erotic suicide, his Aussie hotel room littered with bottle of speculative prescription drugs, his timing couldn't have been more off. Seven or eight years earlier and the stardom/martyrdom equation would have emblazoned his name next to Kurt, Tupac, or even Buddy Holly - suicide, murder, plane crash. Or if he had waited, his second coming may have catapulted him into the limelight along side John Travolta, whose career boom is a recent example of life after coma. Or is it coma after coma? Whatever the case may be, Michael missed out on the upcoming INXS twenty city tour. An undertaking which may have brought him to the attention of Quentin Tarantino's Lazarus spotting eye.

Alas, Mr. Hutchence's rhythm was off, thus he is doomed to be the poor soul who pulled the belt a hit too tight, and offed himself when things got sour, not sickly sweet as in the glorified deaths of James (James Dean wore khakis) Dean or Kurt (Courtney's big career move) Cobain. Even Allanis could see the true meaning of irony in the title of the last INXS record, "Elegantly Wasted", for his demise was anything but elegant.

Like Jimmy or Kurt, Gordon Matta-Clark has achieved god status among cults of architects. His early death from cancer in 1978, at the zenith of his career, marked him for immortality. Matta-Clark's split open buildings and other types of de-installations, are undeniably beautiful, dangerous, and a challenge to the rigid confines of architectural form. Yet, the genius myths (and truths) which have swirled around his life and death (especially since decon hit the scene) have given him glamour, fame, and deathlessness.

Wielding a chain saw, a hack saw, a crow bar and miles of extension cords, Matta-Clark cut gaping holes into existing buildings, exposing other meanings, other layers and other spaces, as he might have put it. To document his artwork, since the buildings he attacked were usually slated for total demolition, he photographed these dangerous spaces and filmed the anarchitecture (his term.) Seduced by the act of Matta-Clark's unbuilding, architects are inspired to make again these spaces. But to attempt to build in this manner is to patently ignore the critical stance towards architecture which Matta-Clark took. It is to fall into the trap of the temple of Matta-Clark, icon. Yve-Alain Bois writes in Formless, a User's Guide, the book of the month:

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Matta-Clark

considered architecture a clownish and pretentious enterprise, and he would have been particularly enraged at having become a model, enraged to see provisional disruptions of building stylized under the label of "deconstructionism" in the architectural projects of certain of his former professors at Cornell.

If the architect takes himself for a sculptor, he masks his own role in capitalist society, which is to build rabbit warrens the order of real estate developers. (p.191)

Not really interested in bridging any gap between architecture and art, Matta-Clark spurned his Cornell education and the uptight binds of the gentleman's profession. When I was at Cornell in the early 90's Matta-Clark's work was not taught, or even acknowledged, except as a subterranean find, which student after groupiesque student would shuttle home from the library to study as a guide to living out the promise of deconstruction. A Matta-Clark and a Libeskind monograph were as de rigueur as a Sonic Youth CD and a pair of Doc Martins. But Richard Meier, who has now taken to traipsing around the Getty in a Frank Lloyd Wright inspired cape, wasn't subject matter at Cornell either. We students were taken way back to the early cannon of Modernism. Danger came from a chance brush with the members of the historic avant-garde. So when we unearthed Matta-Clark, a folk hero was born. His past was like our present and he had gotten enraged by it. He had danger, youth, talent, fame and a future which was cut short just in time for him not to make any crucial mistakes which would hinder his cult status. Most importantly, he made sure to document his work. So it was glory be and all praise.

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When the films of Matta Clark were restored and screened recently at both UCLA and SCI-Arc, I was giddy. Finally, I had the chance to see the punk granddaddy of deconstruction, the Sid Vicious of architecture on the big screen. So I went to watch. I brought along a friend who I was trying to convince that architecture is cool, and I was appalled. He was bored. What those few yards of film re-

vealed was not the spontaneous energy which I had expected. Nor was it the raw wonderment which is found in early CBGB footage or the films of Warhol's Factory, or even, the mainstream psychedelic era movies, made just a few years before Matta-Clark's films, where the actors are so stoned and the camerawork so trippy, that you get a contact high just by pressing play on the VCR. The films by provocateur Gordon Matta-Clark were straight out of the me (not m-m-my) generation school of documentaries and they were boring.

Office Baroque (1977), which I watched primarily on fast forward at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture a couple months after I left the large screen screening, finds Matta-Clark crouched amidst extension cords and ripped up floorboards. He is bare chested and he sports jeans and a jaunty workers cap. In a pose worthy of a Jeff Striker movie, Matta-Clark deftly changes the chain on his saw. His masculinity and roguish edginess are in full command. His glorious voice over, which echoes off the Italian travertine walls of the temples of high art, says that occupying the space of his work is akin to the layers of line in a drawing. A man alone, prying up the floor, hard at work on his anarchitecture, Matta-Clark aims for a complexity which is indecipherable. "An undocumentable documentary" is how he describes his work. From viewing his photographs and even snippets of his films, it seems that he majestically achieves this goal and gets rock god status to boot. A deconstructivist Robert Plant. Who wouldn't be moved by a house split manually in two? He becomes the hero/martyr of the cult of labor, a grungy, manly tribe found in wood shops and scrap yards everywhere. But, unfortunately for us, Matta-Clark's

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films, when viewed in bulk, undermine his successful stabs at complexity and underline a certain godawful staleness to this supposedly cutting edge work.

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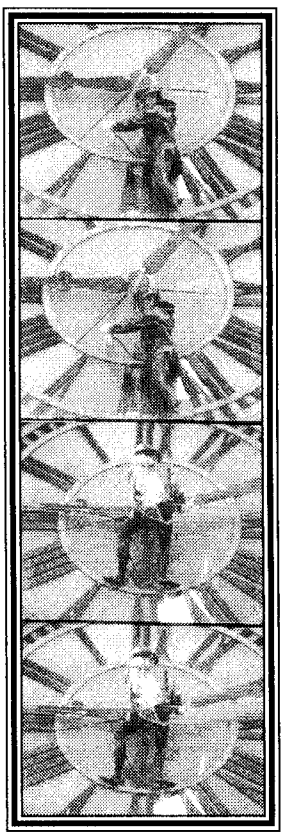
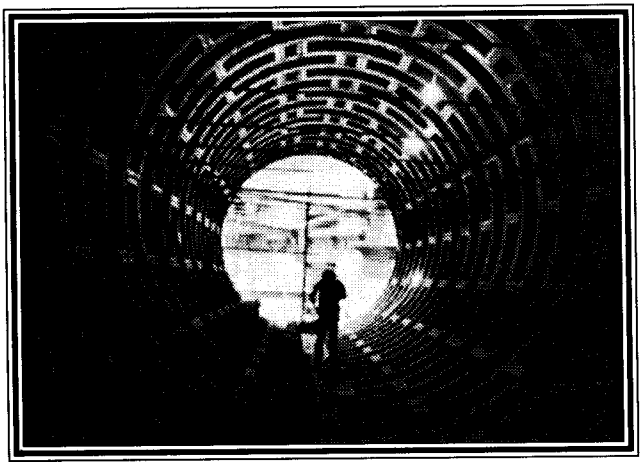
If anything, his work serves to give conservative architecture students a surly edginess.



Clockshower (1973) features Matta-Clark performing his morning ablutions while suspended from the face of a clocktower. The film wants to call into question the banalities of everyday private, indoor life. It challenges routine spaces by placing the bathroom on the face of the clock in public and on a grand scale. Unfortunately, the real time footage and the unrelenting washing off of shaving cream (such a manly, Dada endeavor) smacks of self indulgent, self important, high art film-making. So, even though his work wishes to achieve ruptures in art and life, and to bang hard on the doors of the establishment, Matta-Clark's anarchy becomes part of (and never was really far from) the world he strived to criticize. If anything, his work serves to give conservative architecture students a surly edginess.

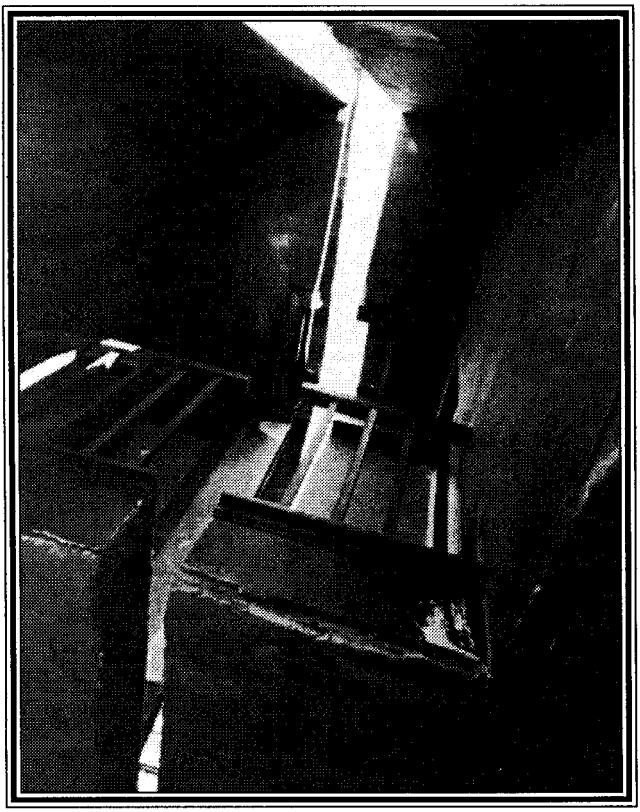
The extent to which Matta-Clark's work has been deradicalized can be seen at the exhibition currently on display at the MAK Center. About a dozen or so of his photographs, an artist book, and a video collection of his films are all tastefully framed



within Shindler's Kings Road house. All there is warm wood panels, Japanese cum California styling - no angry young man could withstand the treatment. The photographs are small and pretty much forgettable. In case the images don't engrave themselves on your retina, the MAK has created a catalogue to go along with the exhibition. It is a slim volume, elegantly designed, containing a couple nausea inducing essays, and tiny, to the point of cute, reproductions of Matta-Clark's work, all bundled in gobs of white space and class.

So the rowdy intellect who thumbed his nose at the establishment of art and architecture, is now absorbed into that culture like one of the original disciples. Just as Cobain's death allowed grunge to jump in and out of mainstream culture, depositing work boots and white male angst into middle America, Matta-Clark's death and subsequent rebirth as the lost Jedi knight of deconstruction freed architects to act out their own Rebel With a Cause fantasies of form. But I wonder how enraged (Bois' term) he would have been by being appropriated by mainstream architects. His brother had committed suicide by jumping out the window of Gordon's studio, so it would seem that he would be familiar with the death timing principle. Perhaps the best timing Matta-Clark should have used (cancer aside) in order to continue to maintain a critical distance would have been to live, and to keep living into boring ripe old age, thus undermining all the factors for god status.

Gordon What?



When I was with Superstudio in Florence, Italy, we built models of iconographic buildings out of salt. Containers of water were hung above the models, slowly dripping. The salt dissolved. The icons transformed, eventually completely melted.

Architecture melts in time. It never leaves simply. There is always a memory, a trace, an influence. When a building is gone, its mark is still fading. Its fade becomes a part of eternity.

Michele Saee

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When Superstudio split up, I came to Los Angeles to work for the firm Morphosis.

I had no idea who Gordon Matta-Clark was.

I started teaching at the Southern California Institute of Architecture where I met Aaron Betsky. In a conversation he mentioned the name of Gordon Matta-Clark and saw that I had no reaction. He was astonished that I had know idea who he was. He proceeded his quasi-interrogation by asking me if I had seen the movie Blade Runner. I had not. It was inconcievable to him that this could be, given the nature of my work, the context of SCI-Arc, and the situation of an architect working in Los Angeles.

So, I went and looked up Gordon Matta-Clark.

There are moments of identification with another that seem instantaneous. "Oh, it's you." Looking at a publication of his work, I heard myself say, "Yes, I have known you all of my life."

This was the beginning of an unfolding of his work in the context of my life. This was not an incorporation of his ideas, nor was it a meshing of our ideas. This presence was innate and already there. It was at this point that this presence began to reveal itself to me.

Passion is not described by words alone, but by a connection to its acts.

The films of Gordon Matta-Clark are a documentation of the act. Passion is instantaneous, not preplanned. His films are not about the planning of the act, but of the act itself. The trace of the act, in this case both the fact of the event and the documentation of that fact, relives itself in our connection to the passion expressed. The event is marked in time. The act, however leaves with a trace. The trace is not over but rather is melting in time.

Melted in time like salt in water.

The physical residue of the acts of Matta-Clark are short lived. The cutting of a building soon to be torn down. The

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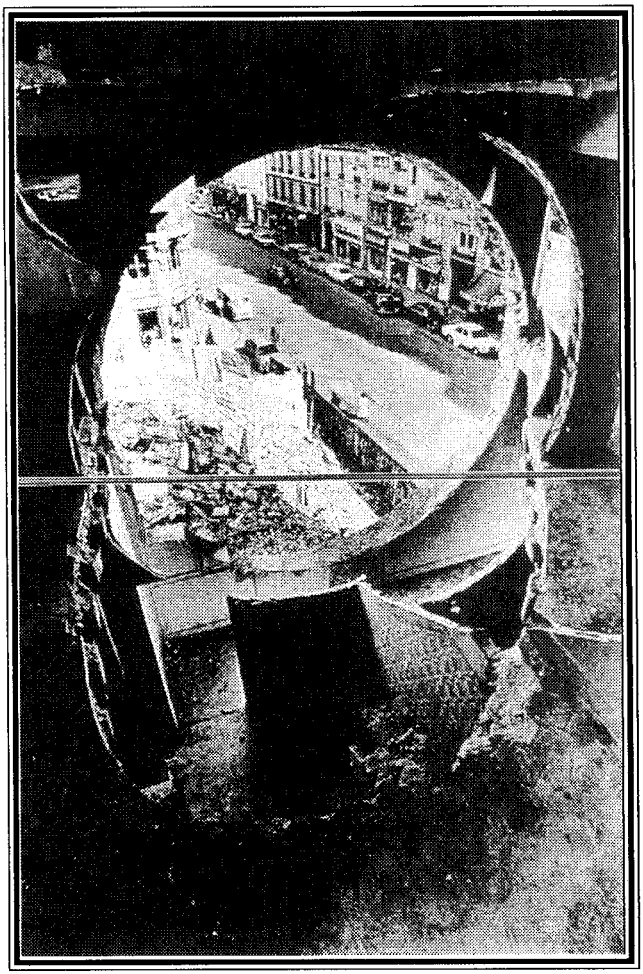
impact of the cut, however, resides long after the building is gone. Like the event of fire and its residue of ash. You almost need for the ash to be swept away. The physical traces to vanish. Yet impact resides long after the ashes are gone. It is here that revelation occurs. Remembrance and unfolding of the intensity that is nearly impossible to look at straight on. Indeed the significance of his own short life and the impact of the intensity of passion he displayed still resides. Melted in time, unfolding and revealing itself in our connection to the underlying passion displayed in these acts. His absence as well as the absence of the physical traces of the work are part of the genius of Matta-Clark.

The display of passion involves a confrontation with fear and a stepping into the unknown.

Matta-Clark articulates the point where we'd like to stop. The resistance in that moment to go beyond. With saws and hammer breaking the safety of that moment that would keep us from moving into the beyond. Cutting into the very beam that holds the wall and the ceiling. Cutting into our very understanding of safety. Standing on the fluctuating floors that are the consequence of the act. Fear is present as a threshold and is sustained, prolonged, and articulated. There is no turning back.

I found an essence in the work of Matta-Clark that was intrinsic. The immediate connection. The feeling of "I know." The instant I realized that, I didn't need see each particular project or event. Since then I have wittnessed how influential his short presence has had on architects and artists alike. Hitting already existing chords in us, causing us to act. This influence is easier to embody than it is to articulate. He demostrates the very nature of a building by the intensity of its violation. An opening in the wall is not a window but a subtraction. A taking away. The process was painful. Cutting into a building. What is it about a building that makes this so?

It is difficult to speak of. To present. By its very nature presentation causes us to pre-plan. To state, to concretize. There is nothing concrete about this work. The work brings about an intense longing. A demonstration of need to state what we cannot say but about what we share and what we make. The longing to speak of the thresholds, the points of no return, and the fear that was met. The longing to say the words "I know" and for connection.



To melt in time like salt in water.

The Man on Stage
June, 1955, The Desert Inn, Las Vegas

"This is a fabulous, extraordinary madhouse."

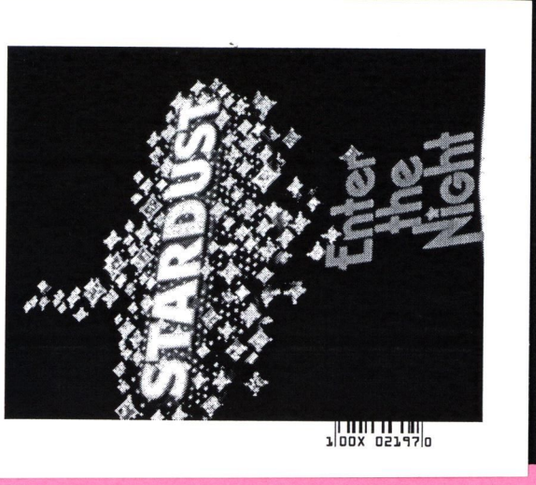
♣

The man on stage is wearing a blue, double breasted dinner jacket with a red carnation in his lapel. He has just walked on stage and artificial fog surrounds his legs, a backdrop of the Houses of Parliament back him as well as his name in flashing lights. His thinning hair is brill-creamed back, his ears are a tad too big for his head. He is in his fifties and his shoulders are slightly hunched. He eyes the crowd sideways, a smirk turning into a huge, crooked smile as the crowd gives him the best receptionhe has had in years. The place is roaring. Caught in the rapture, a vacationing couple from Des Moines are on their feet, clapping, whistling and stomping. Zsa Zsa's in the front row, her clapping hands are a blur of red enamel and jangling gold. David Niven is sitting quietly with his wife. Humphrey Bogart is there, too. He's with Bacall. So is Judy Garland. Joan Fontaine, as well.

Jeremy Xavier

Is it Sinatra on stage? No, he chartered a plane from Hollywood to Vegas just to be in the audience. He is up front with Zsa Zsa. Is it Sammy Davis? No, he's performing across the street, urging his audiences to go see this show. Dino? Nope. The man on stage is too effete to be any of them. And too old. He speaks with a clipped, dreadfully English accent, a stylized accent from the 1930s. His intonation is a linguistic relic from the age of Deco. He leans to the microphone and says, "Now, I should like to sing you a song about a rather disagreeable lady from South America who, throughout her long and checkered existence, resolutely refused to dance." The room fills with laughter which bursts into an applause. Again, the crooked grin.

The man on stage was Nöel Coward, singer, actor, author, playwrite, dandy and all around Bon Vivant. A man with a penchant for smoking jackets and cigarette holder. A man unafraid to wear a cravat. A wicked wit with a stream of wildly successful plays in London's West End as well as Broadway. He was our century's Oscar Wilde, he was quintessentially British and in June of 1955, he was the ultimate Vegas act.



instant day #21

Nutrition Facts

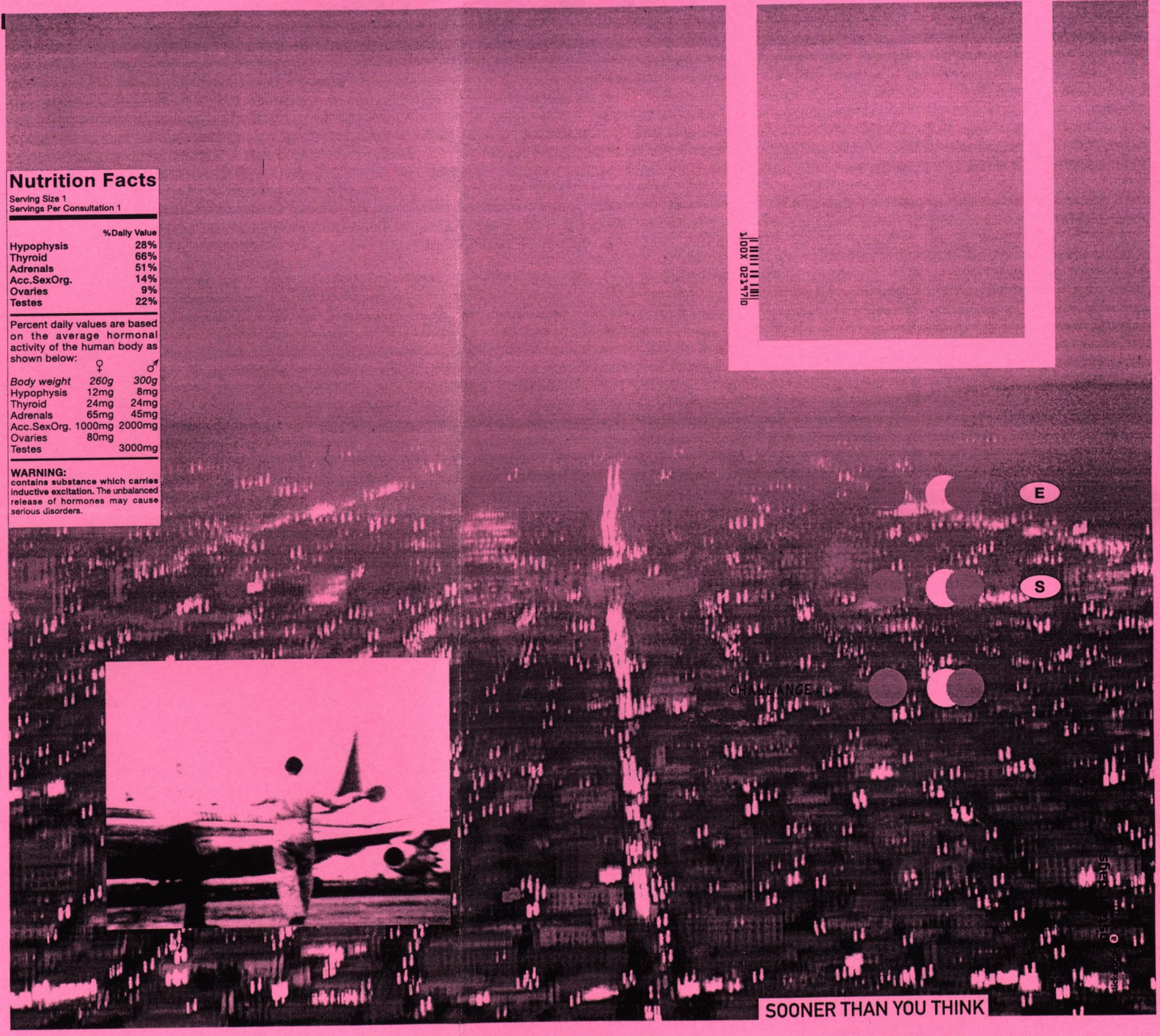
Serving Size 1
Servings Per Consultation 1

	%Daily Value
Hypophysis	28%
Thyroid	66%
Adrenals	51%
Acc.SexOrg.	14%
Ovaries	9%
Testes	22%

Percent daily values are based on the average hormonal activity of the human body as shown below:

	♀	♂
Body weight	*260g*	*300g*
Hypophysis	12mg	8mg
Thyroid	24mg	24mg
Adrenals	65mg	45mg
Acc.SexOrg.	1000mg	2000mg
Ovaries	80mg	
Testes		3000mg

WARNING:
contains substance which carries inductive excitation. The unbalanced release of hormones may cause serious disorders.



PSf. 5.2 x21cm equals 2.03 x8.20in

I have made one of the most sensational successes of my career
and to pretend that I am not
absolutely delighted would be idiotic.
I have had screaming rave notices and the news has
flashed round the world.
I am told continually,
verbally and inprint, that I am the greatest attraction
that Las Vegas has ever had and that
I am the greatest performer in
the world.

In June, 1955, a middle-aged Englishman was now the coolest thing in Vegas. The swaggering young bucks in the Rat Pack all paid homage. Frank Sinatra was on the radio telling people that if they wanted to hear how a song should be sung, they should hurry and catch Nöel at the Desert Inn. Life Magazine took Coward to the desert and photographed him in a tuxedo in the 118 degree heat. He was holding a cup of tea.

How did all this come about? How did the one time king of the British theatre suddenly become the toast of Vegas? It starts at Blue Harbour, Nöel's seaside house in Jamaica, and a destination in every jet setter's Baedeker. Nöel played host to everyone from W. Somerset Maugham to Rita Hayworth. They all enjoyed the quiet solitude of Jamaica's North Coast. They lounged in their linens and sipped rum drinks by the pool. It was a constant cocktail party and Nöel's writing was starting to slip. He had too much contact with his guests and felt obligated to join in their revelry. As the Roundhill resort just down the coast became de rigeur for the famous and fabulous, Nöel had more and more visitors stopping by. What he needed was a one bedroom cottage just up the hill from Blue Harbour. A retreat at which he could spend mornings writing and distance himself from his guests. Peter O'Toole could get a little rowdy after a few drinks, and then there was Lawrence Olivier's search for the perfect ganja.

As 1954 came to a close, Nöel was offered $15,000 a week for a series of shows at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas. He was to perform two shows each night, a dinner show at 8 pm and a supper show at midnight. The terms stated that he would perform seven nights a week for four weeks in June. After flying to Vegas in December, 1954, to have a look around, he accepted and set about making plans for Firefly, his one bedroom retreat in the hills above Blue Harbour. It was at Firefly that he built the "room with a view" based on his song of the same name. I've made the pilgrimage to this room and it does have the most spectacular view. The window is huge and more of an opening since it has no glass, just a canvas overhang that juts out a few feet, casting shade to those in the room. Outside lays a sprawling lawn, lush vegetation, bursting bougainvillea and the impossibly blue Caribbean sea.

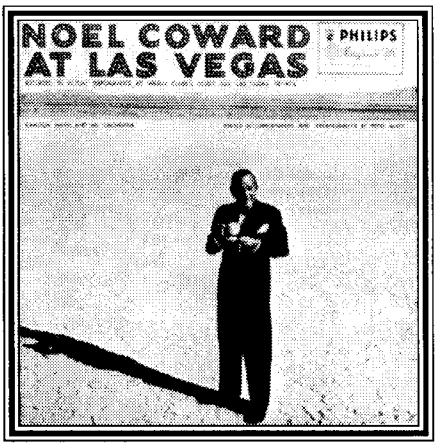
And so it was that on June 5, 1955, Nöel and Cole Lesley, his companion, arrived in Las Vegas for the engagement at the Desert Inn. He rented a yellow and black Ford convertible and proceeded to turn the town on its collective ear. Zsa Zsa sent him a life sized teddy bear. There were all night parties in his honor and a steady stream of well wishers flying to town to catch his show. Cole Porter, Ethel Merman,Tallulah Bankhead, Kay Thompson and Jack Benney all arrived to catch the Nöel-mania that was sweeping Vegas. From the center of the maelstrom, he simply gestured nonchalantly with his cigarette holder and tossed off witticisms which had one observer commenting, "Nöel, you bring such class to Vegas." And he did.

But it was a campy class. He never took himself too seriously and he never displayed the trappings of snobbery. Nöel was a gentleman in the true fashion and was just as gracious to the Queen Mum when she visited him in Jamaica as to vacationing Midwesterners who stopped him in Vegas to give him words of praise. He was never stuffy and even performed a decidedly risque version of Cole Porter's "Let's Do It", featuring the following couplets:

The birds and bees do it.
Nice young men who sell antiques do it.
Let's do it, let's fall in love.

Louella Parsons can't quite do it,
because she's so highly strung.
Marlena might do it, but she looks far too young.
Each man out there shooting craps does it.
Davy Crocket in that dreadful cap does it.
Let's do it, let's fall in love.
The Brontes felt that they must do it.
Earnest Hemingway could just do it.
Let's do it, let's fall in love.

Each clam we consume does it.
Liberace, we assume does it
Let's do it.
Let's fall in love.



It was this combination of talent, novelty and charm that made Nöel the hit of Vegas that summer. He was old hat in his native England, but the post-war, heightened sophistication of the average America made them ready for his clever humor and worldly demeanor.

The whole set is immortalized on the "Nöel Coward Live in Las Vegas" record, which features all the songs and the in between song banter. It is Nöel at his best, performing classics like "Mad Dogs and Englishmen", "A Room with a View" and the aforementioned version of "Let's Do It." The record is an artifact of Vegas in its naivete, before the self conscious, ironic interpretations. It is a testament to a legendary performer taken by surprise at his own success and enjoying every minute of his half hour set. It portrays Vegas as the exciting town it was, and America's willingness to appreciate a world-class artist, even when critics in his native England were claiming he "murdered his own songs." It was, perhaps, one of Nöel Coward's finest moments.

And it happened in Las Vegas.

At long last, when all goodbyes were said,
I lost $15 very quickly at blackjack and went to bed.
It has been an extraordinary experience and one of the most reverberant successes I have ever had...

Formless, or

Thesis Plays the Odds on Form

Thesis at the Southern California Institute of Architecture this year is not playing by the time-proven SCI-Arc rules. On the whole, thesis projects are lacking in formal study. Ten to Fifteen years ago, SCI-Arc was at the 'cutting edge,' of design study, pushing a form-based, materials heavy, decon-ish style of architecture.

In 1998, SCI-Arc thesis work signals a shift in the prevalent attitude at SCI-Arc, and perhaps beyond. Why have we thesis students begun to lose interest in the kind of work that defined the school?

With the popularization of architecture, the commodification of architecture, the 'glossing' of architecture, which can be seen in the current media blitz surrounding the Getty Museum opening, our medium has slipped to the realm of fashion. Is there very much difference between Architecture Magazine and Vogue? The latest

Michael Pinto

issue of London style magazine Wallpaper, the Stuff that Surrounds You, celebrates Alvar Aalto's 100th birthday, as well as, the latest Ferrgamo shoes. Architecture can now be qualified through the image. Moss, Zaha, Wolf, and the others are all very photogenic; the architecture that this group has spawned has developed in response to the media's desire for fashionable gloss.

Here's the problem:
architecture can't be fashionable.

Look at Eisenman's work from the eighties... the Wexner or the Social Housing in Berlin. To me, it now seems out of style, whereas, the even mediocre work from the fifties (where form followed function - bad words) seems dated yet not irrelevant. (Just this summer MTV featured a fifties styled motel as its 'Beach House' set.) Eisenman was an innovator of fashion. The flaw is that he and others have tried to play the game of fashion with a medium that uses steel, concrete, wood, and glass instead of denim, cotton, rayon, or silk.

Architecture is expensive. You can't buy discount architecture... at least not yet. There are thesis projects at SCI-Arc this year which seem interested in challenging this notion. One for example is a project proposing a mass-produced architecture product to be marketed by Nike sneakers. One is a project for a Gap store in former counter-culture Venice, California (the site of 80's SCI-Arc formal interventions). There is this zine... 'loud paper', a project that offers an architecture on paper, thus never entering the physical permanence which is the downfall of form-based architecture. There is my project, inspired by the marketing tools directed at teenagers creates an ephemeral youth center in the Max Factor Building in Hollywood. There are others.

Are we afraid to continue to invent new ways to generate form? Perhaps.

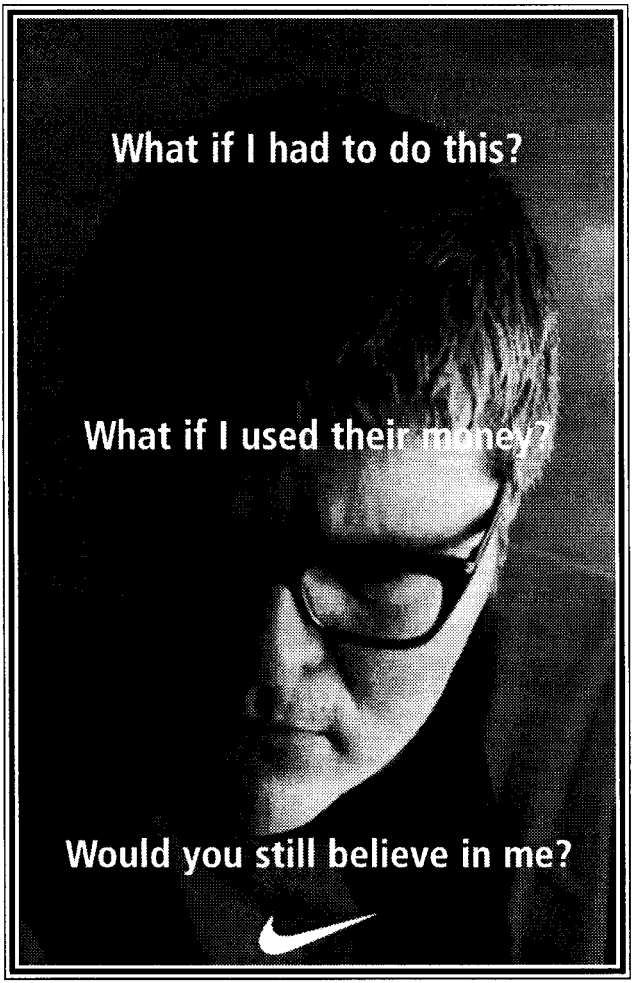
Are we confused?

Maybe.

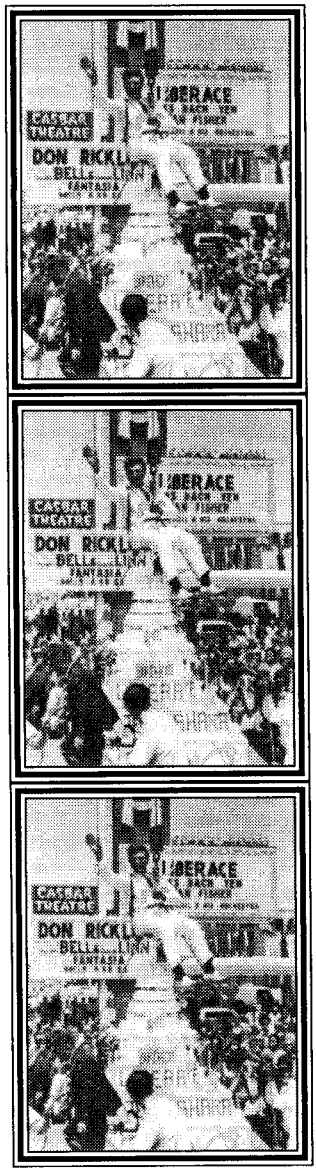
How do we resolve graduating from a school with such a history of form-making and undertaking a thesis which then sidesteps the issue? We, as a group, are not tackling the issue head-on.

In the seventies SCI-Arc was founded in an adapted warehouse. The issue of the day was how do we deal with the glut of abandoned industrial buildings. Today when all the abandoned warehouses have been turned into fashion design workshops, multimedia production offices, and artist lofts, the question is how do we deal with the prevalence of a commodity-based, image-based, fashion-based culture?

If we were smart we might merely recognize this growing interest in a relevant alternative to form. Instead of feeling as though what they were doing was 'dirty,' many of the thesis projects, those listed above and others, could have benefited from a dialogue on this subject.


What if I had to do this?
What if I used their money?
Would you still believe in me?

Pacific Public Rebates



Pacific

1. tending to diminish conflict
2. peaceful, tranquil
3. reduced to peaceful submission
4. subdued

Public

1. of , concerning, or affecting the community or the people
2. participated in or attended by the people or community
3. generally or widely known
4. open to or shared by the people

Rebates

1. concern, or affects within the community or the people
2. participation in or attendance by the people or community
3. general or widely available knowledge
4. openings to or endeavors by the people

Kevin Mulcahy

♥

"Pacific Public Rebates" is an initial foray into the heavily hegemonic notion of public space as a continuous physical condition which supports a community of people defined by a commonly held set of ideals. By rebate, I mean the deduction from an amount to be paid or a return of part of an amount already paid. The general qualification for rebate is discourse. I am interested in the range of available public space for discourse. It is psychological public space, or rather, the availability of a public discourse which is fundamental to a strong and engaged public. My ambition, is to offer a perspective which links public space, public discourse, and the inalienable human right of free speech. As a point of entry, I would like to recount an experience I had several years ago. I offer this as a simple point of reference from which I will develop a series of qualifications or rebates.

When I arrived in Vienna, Austria for the first time, one of my first orders of business was to slip through the streets of the city, to encounter and become intimately familiar with the body of public work which my soon-to-be boss had accomplished over the previous thirty years. The shops, buildings, and at times, the streets themselves had been handled in very particular manners. Their presence was twisted and cobbled. For an American like myself, the city was only familiar in image, but not in texture. I was used to the spread out uniformity of malls, business districts, and office parks which generally constitute American public spaces.

About midway between the Graben and Micheler Platz, I stood with a friend facing a small shop. Quietly, we each assessed the project and its motives until a stout man in his later years approached us. Without the customary introduction (either Austrian, which he was surely familiar, or the wide open smile and handshake of the American greeting) this guy started, pointing, waving, intoning and gesturing like a mad conductor on holiday.

I stood there somewhere between a state of amazement (due to the man's forthright and committed passion to the subject matter) and one of amusement (due to my complete deficiency with respect to the German language). He spoke rapidly in his thick Austrian dialect, pausing for a periodic breath and becoming increasingly enveloped in his lecture. As quickly as he had begun and satisfied that he had made his point, he clos-

I was overwhelmed by his active role, a role of participation and responsibility, which this man exhibited to a stranger in a public space, his public space.

ed with a greeting and he continued walking down the street.

Since I only understood the body language, I turned to my German speaking friend for a verbal translation. The public address amounted to something like this: 1) The gentleman had noticed our interest in the shop; 2) He too, was interested in this recent addition to his city (although the subject of our conversation has been complete for approximately 10 years); 3) He recognized the architect's work, not in the stylistic sense, but in the sense that he was able to place the work in context with other work around his city, both of the architect and well beyond; 4) Finally, he began to criticize the shop in terms of its accomplishments and shortcomings relative to his city, his values, and his understandings of how a balance was struck between the public interest and his personal, or private interests.

I was overwhelmed by his active role, a role of participation and responsibility, which this man exhibited to a stranger in a public space, his public space. Subsequently, I became aware that his exhibition was actually a common level of responsibility and personal interest which the Viennese display regarding their public space, the city. Upon reflection, the remarkable part of this episode was, in fact, my reaction. I was completely unaccustomed to this sort of public behavior.

Acts of congregation, communication, proliferation, and isolation are a few of the daily exercises we perform automatically every day in public without excessive contemplation. Underlying each of these activities is a deep-rooted and highly personal (which is not to say exclusive) understanding of the public realm and how one operates within it. In the following pages, I would like to explore a few of the interpretive avenues that this brief recollection affords, and at the same time present a series of public rebates (or possibly debates).

Among the apparent constituent matters are issues of nationality, of national identity, and of nationalism. As well as issues of age and human development; historical and existential dwelling; race and gender classification; leadership and acts of domination; actual versus apparent proximity; socio-political systems; and the inevitably underlying issue of cultural "evaluations".

The nationalities of the characters involved afford a channel for discussing different levels of public discourse.

The strength of the American image has afforded me with an unrestricted access to the world...

The Austrian was born and raised in the city, so he acquires a particular "response"-ability. He has watched the city grow socially, politically, and economically. Thus, his view of what has become and is currently important, relevant, or culturally valuable is based in single, dominant city. I, on the other hand, come from a background of migratory habitation, constantly shifting my focus and therefore shifting my viewpoint. Perspective and reference become the points for discussion. The scenario highlights for both parties issues of vested interest and the notion of identifying with the city itself and possibly the boundaries of country or the nature of nationalism itself.

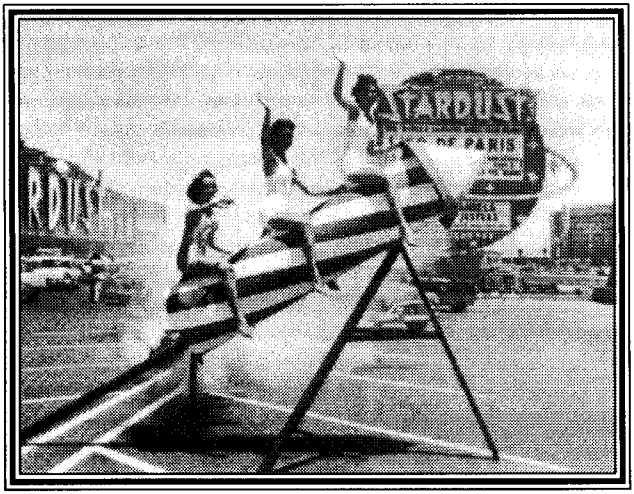
While constructing this conversation, we may confront the matters of an age discrepancy. While I may be a member of the late twentieth century global museum marauders on tour to collect a plethora of personal experiences and anecdotes about the neat places I saw while on my summer vacation, the Viennese gentleman is likely carrying on in a very different manner, one which is rooted in the era which restricted the type of transportation. The strength of the American image has afforded me with an unrestricted access to the world which the Viennese gentleman has not necessarily been privileged. He has been a part of the early and mid twentieth century European culture which has endured the likes of two world wars fought inand around his city.

I have characterized myself as the quintessential passive "Vidiot," obsessed with consuming imagery at a senseless pace, with never a response or question other than the one driven by my own personal and narcissistic pleasure. As I move from image to image of the city to the city, I manage

my sensory devices in a way which relates all things to my own previously organized collection of images. I review the shop in Vienna, organize it into a context which situates this shop next to the cache of all other shops sorted in my memory; auto and taco shops on Lincoln, tee-shirt shops on the Third Street Promenade, souvenir shops at the amusement park. The passive nature of my experience is in fact anything but passive. In fact, my organization gives rise to a mental "space" which this shop may not have participated in previously. I have collapsed an extraordinary geographical space (distance as friction between places). Through this organization, the shop in Vienna, Austria emerges as one involved in a deep cultural history, layers of culture informing alternate self referential strategies, which make me recognize its gestures towards citizenship. When I apply what I have learned in Austria to my home turf, the ground on which I stand resonates with history.

I move through my system of imagery recall; a shop, small shops, Vienna, Austria, Vienna, Virginia, small shops, and Tyson's Corner Shopping Mall (so full of small shops, in fact so jam pack with small shops that I lose sight of the exit.) I am immersed in the Mall itself. As I stand with a friend facing a small shop (this time in Vienna, Virginia), I recognize the season's greetings and decorations, the buzz of Christmas shoppers infects my body. I have been transported here in some way by my imagination.

I notice a stout gentleman standing alone. He seems quite out of place, yet quite engaged. He is staring headlong into the Bloomingdale's entrance. Shoppers stream pass him with such regularity that he appears to be moving himself. I approach him. Without the customary introduction, I begin to discuss the recent exchange of the commercial real estate property from Woodword and Lothrop to Bloomingdales. I discuss the mall culture and the changes that this signifies, further the discussion of the recent stock market fluctuations and the devaluation of the Woodword and Lothrop holdings relative to the recent surge in market values of Macy's and the introduction of Nordstrom's "going public." I am interested, and continue discussing the current issues of this public place... Shoplifting is on the increase, but due to the Christmas buying frenzy (in fact



the frenzy is particularly excessive this year given the stability of the dollar and the decrease in the prime interest rate issued by the Treasury Department), this tends to offset the anticipated loss Bloomingdales will suffer. On and on I go...The improved surveillance systems, the improved convenient on-line counter at the wrapping center. As I discuss in this manner, I create a valuable linkage of public spaces.

A moment later I recognize that our conversation has concluded, so, with a wave, I depart and I continue walking and shopping the mall corridors. As I recount my encounter, I have the sense that we had shared a conversation; a common understanding, and an exchange of similarities as well as differences which extended my (and hopefully his) sense of public space. Discourse as a form of reciprocity, something exchanged, is a medium which expands the concept of space beyond the purely architectural or physical, and into a global mental realm.

Vegas is a State of Mind

Las Vegas occupies the netherlands of the American cultural imagination. And that is perhaps the only place it exists these days. Curves of spangled showgirls glisten along side 99 cent wet pink goblets of shrimp cocktail. Actually, Hunter S. Thompson priced the crustaceans at 29 cents in 1971, but memory needs to keep up with inflation. Free, free, free drinks, high rollers and low down crooks. Dean Martin stands front and center, flanked by the rest of the Rat Pack, their skin taking on the rosy glow of the Sands casino lights. The Sands, the Riveria, the Sahara, the Flamingo, and the Desert Inn are all reflections in the pool of high class seediness, decadence, leisure, and, in true American tradition, freedom.

Vegas is a state of mind. Since the hedonistic fantasies of yesterday have been replaced by Disney stylings and family style entertainment, the only place left for exploring the "real Vegas" is in memoirs or outside of the city itself. To imagine Vegas from anywhere but Vegas is to indulge in the darker side of the American Dream, to give way to an ancient fantasy stirred up by Hollywood of the possiblitlites of the West, of windfalls of cash and of Warren Beaty look-

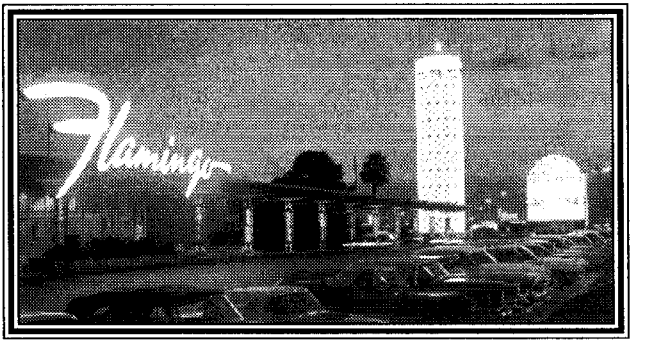
Mimi Zeiger

ing mobsters. Like a true mirage, and not a Steve Wynn masterpiece which erupts lava every fifteen minutes like a hard working playboy, unconscious Vegas is all the danger and debauchery of frontier life complete with a twenty-four hour breakfast. The clatter of the Las Vegas roulette wheel may not be as sophisticated as Monte Carlo, but the tableaux still sparkles under a Lemon Scent Pledge gloss of high style and exclusivity. Personally, I have always wanted to run away and elope in Reno, finding Vegas just a tad too snazzy for my purposes. (Of course, then I would miss out on the wedding chapel package which includes renting a gown and flowers, as well as, for an extra $150.00 an Elvis impersonator singing three songs and walking me down the aisle.) Yet the contemporary Strip has changed entirely in character from the seemingly high class gambling joints so cherished by the likes of Bugsy Siegal, as well as, Howard Hughes.

Early Vegas architecture from the late 1940s and onward through the mid-sixties abandoned ranchy campiness of the western town Las Vegas, in favor of a lavishly scaled version of Los Angeles' Sunset Strip. Bugsy Siegal's Flamingo which opened disastrously on December 26, 1946, was the epitome of Vegas deluxe. Or as Allan Hess writes in his book Viva Las Vegas:

If you had thought you had left the sophistication of Beverly Hills behind, you suddenly rediscovered it here in the desert. The lines of the Flamingo Hotel were horizontal, sharp, and modern like the newest drive-in restaurants; lining the roof and silhouetted against the sky were the steel channels of neon lettering. The sign here said 'Casino Lounge Restaurant,' whereas a drive-in would have read 'Hamburgers Shakes Ham 'n' Eggs.'

But more importantly than bearing some resemblance to a LA burger joint, the Flamingo was style, and boy, it was snazzy. Although it was influenced by the LA rat pack of Shindler, Nuetra, and Lautner, the design by architect George Vernon Russell, added a handful of unspoken urges

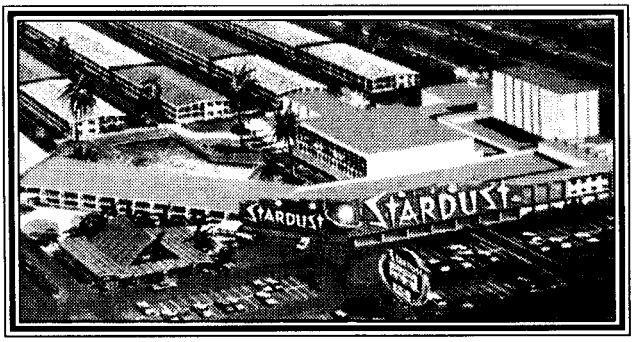


The Los Angeles cannon would never have covered the lounge armchairs in flamingo pink naugahide.

and a pinch of class. The Los Angeles cannon would never have covered the lounge armchairs in flamingo pink naugahide, nor would they have contrasted panorama views of the dolls at poolside with banana leaf print wallpaper. The Flamingo left the rustic-ranch casinos of infant Vegas with names synonymous with the architecture, the Pioneer, the El Rancho, the Last Frontier in the dust.

The Flamingo set the direction of casino styling for the next decade. The Desert Inn (1950), the Sahara (1952), the Sands (1952), the Flamingo (remodeled to keep upwith the times in 1953), the Dunes (1955), and the Rivera (1955) each featured in all their glory in the film Ocean's Eleven, pushed the levels of opulent modernism higher and higher. The architecture maintained a streamlined purity, but was layered with a baroque pastiche of marble, lights, chrome and neon signs. The styling obsolescence of Vegas was keeping pace with the best of Detroit's auto manufacturers.

The abstraction of modernism in the casinos left room around the edges for the dirty signs of life. It seems odd that the architectural language, in the über expression of clean living, brought us Mies' Farnsworth house, all glass house with left nothing about the domestic life to the imagination, would ultimately be the architecture which best expressed Vegas' high end rakish past. Perhaps it was because all events were not programmed under a pictorial theme. Sleek lines were filled in with showgirls, parking lots, beehives, and as Thompson put it, "Debbie Reynolds... yucking across the stage in a silver Afro wig... to the tune of 'Sergeant Pepper.'" The combination of the two worlds is not unlike a particular fur coat owned by Liberace, made by vintage Vegas figure Ray Lenoble who sold coats at the Dunes and once dated a cousin of Al Capone. The coat was



sleek well styled full length Russian-lynx on the outside and the inside was lined with rhinestones. As Ray said,

He would open the coat and blind people.

Maybe the change from the mnemonic Las Vegas to mall town is due to the newly compressed space of the Strip. As the Strip casinos begin Fremont Street style to meet the sidewalk with open doors, and spill slot machines and gamblers out into the street, the vast dark space of desert and parking lots has disappeared. The no-man's land which mediated the distance between the space of signs, as viewed from the car, and the casino doors represented the notion of the Western freedom and frontier. Within those dimly lit spaces, all nature of business could be transacted.

While the bottom line to Las Vegas casinos has always been the dollar, early casino design took a more "if you build it, they will come" approach to attracting gamblers. The ever more elaborate and glamorized casino design and remodels which began in the fifties and sixties signifies a switch to the casino as a consumable attraction which competes and vies for the precious tourist dollar. The Stardust, built in 1958, followed in line by creating 216 foot by 27 foot electric billboard as the casino facade. This expanding opulence in casino design was increasingly blurring the line between sign and architecture. The great neon roadside signs built primarily in the mid-sixties, of the Dunes, Stardust, etc., emblazoned the image of Vegas in our cultural unconscious and continued to bind stylized, glitzy architecture to commercial enterprise.

The mid to late sixties marked a change in ownership on the strip. Howard Hughes investing in the Desert Inn legitimized Las Vegas investment. As a result, the mobsters were fazed out, and corporations such as Hilton and Ramada in the late sixties and early seventies began building casinos. This time is represented architecturally in the move from abstract shed to theme architecture. Caesars Palace, a Durrell Stone inspired version of imperial Rome was built in 1966 and Circus Circus, a pink and white tent with high wire acts performed over the heads of gamblers, was completed in 1968.

The total legibly of Vegas style pop architecture, as seen in the MGM, the Luxor, or the Excalibur (New York, New York is another story) combined with the collapsing of space between the sidewalk and the casino (due to real space restraints and security monitoring - where's that old copy of Foucault?) creates a controlled and sterilized space which is not much different than the space of a suburban mall. The architecture is dedicated to enticing the consumer into a bracketed enjoyment, for a small fee, a pair of sneakers, a cafe latte, or a Tommy Hillfiger flack jacket, thus the Vegas experience becomes a commercial experience. In fact, in the case of Caesars Palace, the route traversed from the Strip to the casino, set back 135 feet, is a complex arrangement of walkways, people movers, and mall shops. As drinking, smoking and gambling became associated with jurassic characters like Milton Berle, Vegas updated its image to include the modern family's ideal holiday: shopping.

At 2 a.m. on the present day Strip, I am walking. From the pedestrian perspective there are a few dim spots along my route. These spaces of darkness are accidental moments between the spectacular events of pirate ships and restaurants that dive. They are places of new, unlit construction, (like where the Sands used to stand) or old roadside fill which is in process of being torn down. Landscape features of lush lawns and swaying palms are bathed in theatrical moonlight which emanates from behind imported rocks and fountain features. The overflow of people from the tourist destinations of The Mirage Volcano and Treasure Island fill in the patches of darkness which may spring up around the second rate casinos. Families may jostle each other's shopping bags while trying to get a better view of the pirate ship, but there is no hint of seediness afoot.

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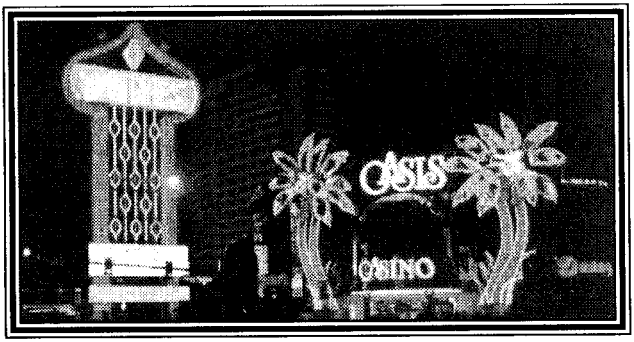

On my long walk back from the Barbary Coast casino ($1.50 well drinks) to Circus Circus (burnt cheese smelling casino) I found fliers littering the ground which advertised call girls. But even the most primal of Las Vegas business transactions has been reduced to a clean(ish) commercialism. The brochures feature pictures of airbrushed escorts, whose pretty pink bodies are laid out along side columns of text which list a number of euphemisms which these girls perform. The entire effect is that of a Denny's menu which pictures each of the coffee shop delicacies, or an L.L. Bean Catalog. Each picture, service, and specification is followed clearly by the price.

The decorated sheds, the large parking lots, and the giant stand-alone signs built by YESCO which were discovered by a couple of hip Yale professors and students in 1968, and then outed in Learning from Las Vegas, have pretty much disappeared. Old school casino design was never stable. Over the last twenty years all available space on the strip has been filled in with more and more real architecture. To the point that the buildings encroach upon the sidewalk changing the Strip from a drive-by experience to a string of pedestrian spectacles designed to lull and entice, not the thin tie and dinner crowd of yesteryear, but fanny-packed families ready for their Kodak moments. Life on the Strip has become so normative that the New York, New York casino has to steal from the grungy glamour of the real world in order to create a new theme. Next to the complicated visuals which absorb everyday life outside of Las Vegas, the theme city seems to be a miniaturization of all that is calm, clean, controlled, and understandable. Real Las Vegas is a disappointment. I prefer the luxurious squalor which fantasy reveals, thus Vegas is a state of mind.

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